

THE MALTA REUNION REPORT:

Tuesday:

Any overseas holiday begins at the Airport Terminal, which in our case was Manchester. The first to arrive for our flight, departing at 2055, were Don & Jeanette Maciver from the isle of Lewis; it is usually those who have the furthest to travel arrive first! Rose and myself were next to arrive; bearing in mind we had all the flight tickets. It would not be too long before the others trickled in, with Ian Duckham and his sister Doreen somewhat later. Naturally, once we had all checked in we headed for the bar to await the flight to Malta GC.

It was a strange feeling, most agreed, when our aircraft landed at former RAF Luqa just before 0200 Maltese time. The coach trip to our hotel and the booking in process- this were we all had wristbands fitted; this wristband would entitle us to the 'all inclusive' benefits of the hotel. The booking in process also included our suitcases being delivered to our rooms, and by the time we sorted ourselves out it would be around 0400 hrs when most of us finally got to sleep.

Wednesday:

What a view across Mellieha bay greeted us all from our individual balconies when we emerged bleary eyed from our short sleep. This first day was dedicated to chilling out, testing out the validity of our white wristbands at the various hotel bars and attending the hotel's welcome briefing where we all signed up for various excursions on offer around the island, along with a trip to nearby Maltese island of Gozo. Incidentally, Brian Peacock and his partner Jan, who made their way independently from Gatwick, and were nowhere to be seen, had to return to Luqa airport to recover some lost property. Meanwhile, Lloyd & Anne Rosentall were soon out making use of the outdoor swimming pool, where they would become a familiar site throughout the week.

That evening, we all paraded in the lounge bar at 1800 hrs, proceeding to the dining room for our meal just over an hour later where the seating plan saw us on 2 tables.

Naturally, we all retreated to the bar area once our meal was over.

Highlight: Vernon Phillips and Des Haines, holding court – how we all laughed.

Thursday:

It would be a fairly early morning awakening as we had all agreed to go on the first (all day) excursion to the Highlights of Malta. This included a visit to the spectacular Mosta church, where during WW2 a German bomb (200 kg) penetrated the dome (Third Largest unsupported dome in Europe) and failed to explode, which was just as well as there was a service taking place below! The trip also included a visit to the inland ancient capital city of Medina (now referred to as the Silent City, helped by only 400 residents now living there) where once the island of Malta was ruled from, before being moved to Valetta.

Thursday (continued):

Just walking around the narrow streets, with our guide bringing to life the history of this walled city was fascinating – along with the far reaching views from the walls, where we saw an old British Military Hospital and remains of many of the former military buildings clustered around it.

After this, we paid a visit to the Limestone Heritage Centre (once a Limestone quarry itself) and were shown a short film on the history and dependence of this naturally occurring island(s) stone, which has been used in Malta & Gozo for centuries, and this continues to this day. This was followed by a tour around the Centre's static display, which we all agreed was most interesting.

The final part of the excursion was to the Valetta the capital City. First we had our lunch (a bit disappointing) in a restaurant bar, which overlooked the Grand Harbour from the back. After lunch, we visited the hospital built by the Knights Hospitalier – most of us agreed that this Hospital, which took a hundred years to build, was awe-inspiring. It was here we were shown a film on the history of Malta, which filled in many gaps in our limited knowledge of the island. We then headed back, quite weary; it must be said, to the hotel.

Once again, we met in the bar and dined together, this time all on one table, courtesy of the ever-helpful dining room staff. It would be an early night for many of us after this day.

Highlight: Finding out that Lord Nelson came to the rescue (on invitation!) of the Maltese, where he displaced the French from the island(s). The British, to this day, are clearly seen as the good guys of all those over the centuries who had invaded the island.

Friday:

This was a day when our group decided to split into 3 Squads:

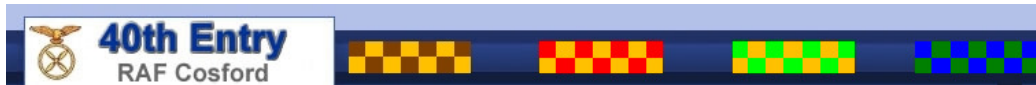
Squad 1 - (Haines/Lister/Phillips/Brian Peacock & Jan) visited the nearby island of Gozo.

Squad 2 – The Rosentall's visited Valetta, specifically for the War Museum.

Squad 3 – (Macivers/Ian Duckham & Doreen/Stinson's) made a trip to the Local village of Millieha across the bay.

We all enjoyed our various trips out, with tales to tell at dinner, and beyond – what with the help of that magic wristband! Rose Stinson was absent from dinner as she was laid low with a cold and a very recent close family loss.

Highlight: Squad 3 ordering a taxi to the village from the hotel and getting a cockney Taxi driver!



Saturday:

This would be another day where our party split up; this time into 2 Squads:

Squad 1 – (Macivers/Stinsons/Rosentalls/Ian Duckham and sister Doreen) took the guided excursion on offer to Gozo. What a trip, everyone agreed (with a superb 3 course dinner included) this turned out to be - especially the enchanting fishing village of Xlendi, where some of us vowed to return one day. Added to this, the trip through the Inland sea around the Blue Lagoon caves on choppy waters was quite something.

Squad 2 – (Haines/Lister/Phillips) made their way on a local bus to Valletta. They particularly wanted to visit the RAFA Club, which they found now closed and then ended up in the British Legion Club, being made most welcome and even given some free snacks. Along with this, Des Haines and Vernon Phillips wished to visit the ancient Masonic Lodge and after locating it the whole group were kindly given a grand tour of this important building.

Once again, after dinner, we utilised the wristbands at the bar!

Sunday:

All of us decided this would be a chill day, after all, we had all been out and about for a few days running and sitting/talking/drinking around the hotel suited us this day – although Des Haines went for his usual marathon walk.

Monday:

All of us, apart from Vernon and Pat Phillips, had signed up for a free trip (The Three Cities), which included a sales pitch involving a new concept in mattresses and associated bedding. Carol Haines, at the demonstration of what was on offer, volunteered to be the sleeper on the mattress. It seems one couple on our coach signed up for one of the mattresses, perhaps down to Carol rather than the salesman!

The trip was spoiled somewhat, some of us said, by the quality of the guide. During this tour we visited the Church of Miracles, where a vision had once appeared and Popes have visited since. We did make stop at a delightful café in Kalkara where a young girl, Katrina, was a delight whilst serving at the tables. I believe she did well for tips from our generous group.

The Macivers/Stinsons made use of some free time to visit the Malta Maritime Museum, although the time allotted did not allow us to spend the time needed at this interesting Museum where the Royal Navy is heavily represented. Incidentally, we found out later that the Museum is housed in what was the former Royal Navy Hospital.

On our return to the hotel, at the hotel's farewell briefing, we found out that Vernon Phillips was laid low and confined to his bed; sadly this would where he would remain until the last day.



Monday (continued):

The evening would be our formal dining out night from this reunion and everyone made the effort to dress appropriately, especially the ladies. Group photos were taken, showing our flag, which was kindly made and donated by Bob Killey. We were greatly assisted in the photography by an ex-army type who told us he had been in the thick of it (not like us) when he did his 2-½ years in the Army Pay Corp!

Tuesday:

This would be a day generally confined to the Hotel for us all; after all, we were scheduled, as told at the Farewell briefing, to leave on the 0945 hrs coach for the airport. Some of the group took the opportunity to keep their room until 1800 hrs.

The coach was before time and the aircraft left at 0045. We arrived back at Manchester at 0320 and said our farewells, looking forward to next years reunion, which is well subscribed already, hopefully with more names to follow.

Everyone agreed it have been a wonderful week, apart for poor Vernon, who luckily had his own personal nurse Pat. The food was judged to be excellent, the service was outstanding and it clearly came across how friendly the Maltese people were, at least to us Brits.

Many thanks to everyone who supported us on this trip and we look forward to seeing you next year.

Dave & Steve

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Grazzi hafna (Maltese)

Thank you very much!